



Personal Narratives of Resilience in the Galilee during the British Mandate Period 1918-1948: Family and Ethnosystems Protective Factors

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Abstract

Forty qualitative interviews were collected from diverse older adults who lived or were born in the Galilee, prior to the establishment of the state of Israel and thereafter. A narrative approach to gerontology was used to collect the data. The narratives explored the lives of older study participants from a risk and resilience, ecological perspective, encompassing cultural, historical, and political reminiscence. The focus was on the manner in which families and ethnosystems impact individual, interpersonal, sociocultural, and societal resilience.

This article presents the results of a research study entitled personal narratives of resilience in the Galilee. The study participants were 40 diverse older adults who lived or were born in the Galilee, prior to the establishment of the state of Israel and thereafter. The purpose of the article was to explicate the factors that influence their individual, interpersonal, socio cultural, and societal resilience, and to better understand the interlocking adaptive social systems that foster resiliency, particularly families and ethnosystems.

For example, a study participant said, my extended family was a prominent, leading family in the village. It is a Maronite family who has been leading Jish for hundreds of years, starting in the Ottoman period, through the British Mandate of Palestine and the establishment of the state of Israel.

The study narratives focused on the time period following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I. After the completion of the negotiations between the British and the French and the border demarcation between the years 1918 and 1923, the Galilee came under British administration, in what was known as Mandatory Palestine, established by the League of Nations to bring stability to the region. Following the declaration of the state of Israel and the resulting 1948 war, the Galilee came under Israeli sovereignty in 1948.

Previous Studies

This study builds on previously published research that has applied the four dimensions of a life story to a resiliency context [1]. A study by Cohen et al. [2] examined 24 ethnically diverse older adults' autobiographical memories of critical life events involving discrimination and oppression. It discussed the impact these events had on individual, family, and societal resilience. The researchers concluded that the capacity for resilience enabled participants to overcome the adversity of oppression, and function as effective, competent adults.

A study by Greene [3] presented a qualitative study about resilience and healing among Cambodian survivors of the communist Khmer Rouge regime. The database of the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) was used to analyze 30 stories of people who survived, but lost family members during the Khmer Rouge regime. Findings suggested that participants attained closure and a sense of justice as a result of their interacting with DC-Cam staff and the United Nations Tribunal when they gained closure about the fate of their family members.

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Theoretical Background

This article combined three bodies of literature to provide a theoretical foundation for understanding the resiliency among settlers of the Galilee 1920-1948: risk and resilience theory, ecological-systems theory, and narrative gerontology. This section discusses the premises and benefits derived from each of these various orientations [4-7].

Choice of theory

Theorists interested in how people survive severe stress and adversity often turn to risk and resilience theory: Research began with developmental studies of children at risk, exploring what traits were prevalent among those children who were relatively more successful in overcoming adversity, such as teenage pregnancy and substance abuse [8-11].

Researchers then turned their attention to what developmental processes led to effective adaptation strategies following harsh conditions [12-14]. This shift in paradigm included the adoption of an ecological-systems theoretical orientation to better understand how people can interact positively with their environment [15], following stressful events such as hurricanes or floods (Gist et al. 1999).

Today, the emphasis in the resilience literature is on the demonstrated behavioral patterns of recovery following stressful events model [16]. That is, the conception of resilience now encompasses the idea that people have the natural capacity whether individuals, groups, communities, or societies to strive to overcome everyday stress and adversity and to move forward with their lives [17,18]. This viewpoint shifts the researchers' attention to how people function effectively following stress or what constitutes a resilient behavioral, functional response following life's difficulties [19,20]. It also underscores the role of protective factors such as families and ethnicity in shielding people from adversity.

Narratives and Ecological Systems

Bronfenbrenner's [15] ecological research design offered a contextual multilevel systems model that can expand the understanding of how social systems influenced people's resilience during the British Mandate. These systems are

- Microsystems, including the immediate, personal, day-to-day activities and roles, such as in the family.
- Mesosystems, which encompass the linkages between two or more settings involving the developing individual, such as family and school.
- Exosystems, which include the linkages between two or more systems that do not involve the developing individual, such as parents and the workplace.
- Macrosystems, which encompass overarching societal systems, such as cultural and societal attitudes.

Bronfenbrenner's [15] schema allowed for a better understanding of how

- Individual and family function is rooted in larger social systems, such as ethnosystems.
- Social and economic justice concerns of poverty and economic development impact individual, family, and community well-being.

- Cultural beliefs and values contribute to larger or collective narratives.
- Historical context and place influence community and family meaning of events.
- Policy structure and development shape community and family development.

Narrative Gerontology

As stated, the article uses a narrative methodological approach to gerontology to explore the lives of older study participants from a life-course ecological perspective. Narrative gerontology is a scientific approach to human development that focuses on the study of aging by obtaining stories or accounts of critical life events as told by older adults [21,22]. The intent is to gather older adults' perspectives on their life-course. A life-course perspective offers a means of viewing a person's key life events. The perspective also considers individual life transitions within family and social contexts such as ethnosystems [23].

Dimensions of a narrative

Building on the ecological metaphor, Kenyon and Randall [22] proposed that narratives should be examined by listening to the storyteller's description of four interrelated dimensions of the narrative:

1. The structural dimensions, encompassing social policies, power relations, and economic conditions.
2. The sociocultural dimensions, referring to social meanings associated with aging and the life-course.
3. The interpersonal dimensions, including families and friends.
4. The personal dimensions, involving internal meaning, feelings, and coherence [22].

Benefits of the narrative approach

A number of gerontologists have discussed the benefits of a narrative multidimensional approach: As suggested by Cole and Knowles [24], narratives are about gaining insights through listening to the experiences of an individual with the understanding that "every in-depth exploration of an individual's life-in-context brings us that much closer to understanding the complexities of lives in communities" (p. 1). Creswell [25] contended that narratives "uncover how life reflects cultural themes of the society, personal themes, institutional themes, and social histories" (p. 49). Moreover, Webster [26] contended that personal stories are "nested within a set of larger stories or 'macro' narratives that reflect shared history, values, beliefs, expectations, and myths" (p. 140). Thus, multiple narratives can reveal cultural aspects of ethnosystems and their relative place in society.

Methodology

Sample

The sample consisted of 40 individuals. Participants were recruited by the researchers based on age and geographical location. Interviews were conducted at the interviewee's homes. Arab interviewees were interviewed in Arabic and Jewish interviewees in Hebrew. Each interview lasted approximately two hours.

Table 1: Cultural Narrative: Open-Ended Interview Questions.

Questions for Jewish Israelis	
1	Where were you born?
2	Where did you grow up? socially, geographically?
3	What was it like to be a child growing up there?
4	What are your earliest memories?
5	What was it like for you during adolescence?
6	Was there much discrimination in your country of origin?
7	When did you come to Palestine? Or were you born here? (Age? Date?)
8	What were your reasons for coming?
9	Describe how you felt in your first year after arrival.
10	What are some of the things that were done in your community that made you or your friends feel welcome?
11	What are some of the things that were done in your community that made you or your friends feel unwelcome?
12	How did people get around difficulties or overcome hassles?
13	Did you know someone who really coped well or got around bad situations? (Who? What did they do?)
14	What made them good at bouncing back?
15	Was there someone who was particularly "good" at bouncing back?
16	What about you?
17	What type of help did people need or want when things got bad?
18	What did your family of origin give you to prepare for the hardships you may have encountered?
19	Tell me about your religious background and training.
20	Tell me about your marriage, first job, or raising children.
21	Did you experience tensions or conflicts with your neighbors? If so describe.
22	If there were tensions, how were they resolved?
23	Did/do you have ideas for conflict resolution?
24	Were there times when you wanted to "get up and leave"? Describe those moments.
25	What made you stay?
26	What changes occurred with the establishment of the state of Israel? Describe.
27	When you look back, would you do things differently? How?
28	When you look back and look at the questions we have discussed, can you point to one or two events that had the most impact on your lives?
Questionnaire for Palestinian Arabs	
1	Where were you born?
2	Where did you grow up? (Questions 5, 6, &7 only if appropriate; see below for alternative questions.)
a.	What was it like to be a child growing up there?
3	What are some early childhood memories?
4	Was there much discrimination in the country?
5	When did you come to Palestine? (Age? Date?)
6	What were the reasons for coming?
7	Describe how you felt in your first year after arrival.
8	What was it like for you during adolescence?
9	What are some of the things that were done in your community that made you or your family feel at home?
10	What are some of the things that were done in your community that made you or your family feel unwelcome?
11	How did people get around difficulties or overcome hassles?
12	Did you know someone who really coped well or got around bad situations? (who? what did they do?)
13	What made them good at bouncing back?
14	Was there someone who was particularly "good" at bouncing back?
15	What about you?
16	What type of help did people need or want when things got bad?

17	What did your family of origin give you to prepare for the hardships you may have encountered?
18	Tell me about your religious background and training.
19	Tell me about your marriage, first job, or raising children.
20	Did you experience tensions or conflicts with your neighbors? If so describe.
21	If there were tensions, how were they resolved?
22	Did/do you have ideas for conflict resolution?
23	Were there times when you wanted to "get up and leave," during the 1948 war? Describe those moments.
24	What made you stay?
25	What changes occurred with the establishment of the state of Israel? Describe.
26	When you look back, would you do things differently? How?
27	When you look back and look at the questions we have discussed, can you point to one or two events that had the most impact on your lives?
Suggested questions to replace questions 7–11 if appropriate:	
28	What was the attitude towards you after the transition from your original village to the new community?
29	Did you feel your new community accepted you?
30	Are there differences between the new and veterans of the community?
31	If there are differences, do you feel any changes over time?
32	Is there a difference in the attitude between older and younger generations?

Demographics of participants

The age of the participants ranged from 74 to 96 years of age. Twenty seven were men; 13 were female. There were 21 Jewish and 19 non-Jewish participants, including members from Muslim Arabs, Christian, Druze and Bedouin ethnosystems. All participants were married or widowed. Their family forms (based on self-defined membership) ranged from nuclear families to large extended families of 20 people or more. Ethnicities, or group membership based on common history and culture, were often at the intersection of religious identities.

Data collection

A team of professors and students at Tel Hai College in Israel conducted the interviews. The study, which was approved by the Institutional Review Board, was guided by a series of open-ended study questions modified from the previous literature. Two sets of questions were developed to be appropriate to the various ethnicity/religion of participants. Researchers conducted semi structured interviews with prepared lists of questions, but they had the flexibility to ask questions not listed to elicit additional information about a particular issue (Table 1).

Data analysis

A content analysis was conducted using ecological-systems and risk and resilience theory. Data analysis involved "moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation" p. 178 to make meaning of the data [27]. This process, known as constant comparison data analysis, involves taking information from data collection and assigning it to emerging categories [25-33]. This also allowed for the development of themes.

Narratives were first analyzed to determine the impact of the social systems with which settlers and indigenous Palestinians interacted. Data was then coded and categorized into the four dimensions of the narrative.

Findings

Previous trauma

Previous trauma or adverse critical events affected participants'

answers to the narrative questions. Two critical events were particularly important:

The Nakba: Haifa had been conquered by Jewish armed forces on April 22nd, 1948, and over 70,000 of its Arab residents became refugees. Following the battle, an Israel Defense Force officer ordered us to accompany him to collect the bodies of deceased Liberation Army soldiers and civilians. We buried them all in a mass grave on a plot next to the main road.

The Shoah: I was liberated in Germany as an Auschwitz survivor. Still wearing my striped prisoner pajamas, I immediately traveled to find my family.

During the Holocaust and the years I had survived on my own, from 1942 to 1946, were the most significant and influential. The day I said goodbye to my dear mother and my brothers also changed the course of my life. The days I wandered alone, escaped dangers, was captured, imprisoned and mostly got help and protection from kind hearted strangers, influenced my life and my belief in man, through all that evil, death and hatred I saw rays of light, time after time

- Nakba means catastrophe and refers to the 1948 events connected with the UN creation of the state of Israel. The result was 760,000 Palestinians were forced out of their places of residence and became refugees.

- The Shoah is a term for the Holocaust, when the Nazis planned to exterminate European Jewry, resulting in the deaths of 6 million Jewish people.

Interlocking adaptive systems

Findings suggest that resilience is a phenomenon that is revealed at the structural, sociocultural, interpersonal, and individual levels of the narratives. However, it should be understood that all four dimensions are interrelated, as seen in a quote below in which family membership, land ownership, and power intertwine to create a sense of pride in belonging:

I was born in the village of Nahf in 1919, to a family that was well known in the village. My family had led the village starting in the end

of the Ottoman Empire. Its power came from owning many lands compared to the other villagers, around 500 dunams, along with being a close-knit, powerful and assertive family.

Structural dimensions

The structural dimensions of the narrative encompass macrolevel events among the settlers, such as social policies, power relations, and economic conditions that contribute to resilience and protect them from adversity. Structural dimensions also include settlers' interactions in social systems of influence that foster resilient-behavioral, functional responses.

Narrative themes suggest

Jewish participants recall learning about Kibbutz life in Europe and immigrating to Israel: We knew we were rebuilding the Galilee. We had been euphoric. There was a feeling we were making history, rebuilding the Jewish settlements. We felt ecstatic; we sat and sang with people who had come from Poland.

Various faiths/ethnicities feel they came together through hard work as "two nations": Overall, I would say that our sector has gone through a terrible crisis in 1948, but through consistent hard work and cooperation between the two nations, we can make a better future for all of us. I am 89, I have worked hard and succeeded, and I think that by encouraging business and boosting the economy, we can make people's lives better and strengthen relations between the two nations here. Making a living is a necessity, and it contributes to stability and overcoming crises. Partnership is better than conflict.

Nation building was a common theme among settlers of diverse ethnicities: After the War, we traveled to France; Marseille, disguised as Australian soldiers seeing their immigration was organized for enlistment to the Israeli Defense Force (IDF). We spent 12 days at sea in a decrepit boat that was forbidden for passenger transport. There were 450 people on board. When we arrived in Israel they were covered with tarpaulins so that no one would see there were people [aboard].

The early days after the establishment of the state were hard. Unlike the other Circassian village, Kfar Kama, some people in Rehaniya had left during the war, families were split up and many were hurt. After the end of Operation Hiram, in October 1948, some people began returning, with the authorities' permission.

Participants reflected on how they personally belonged and took leadership roles in their ethnic group in the Galilee: 1) A Qadi is a judge over Islamic (Muslim) law. 2) A Mufti is an expert scholar on Islamic law and can issue an opinion.

Having been a part of Nazareth's history since the 18th century, my ancestors have been doing two things: occupying the senior religious posts, such as Qadi and Mufti, and the other one running the town hall after this institution was put in place at the end of the 19th century. We were urban high society, having owned (and still owning) lots of property.

Our financial strength has helped us to establish our political power, my son Ahmed was the head of the local council in the village for a while, and even elected to the Knesset for a short period, in a party associated with Ariel Sharon's party.

I would say that surviving 1948's trauma was not simple, but I did it. I think that the way you deal with crises is the real test to people's leadership skills, and I think my father and I did so successfully. Some

people say Nazareth survived because it was a Christian holy city, but the truth is it survived because of the way we showed flexibility and the good decisions we made, some of which I was involved in not only in consulting but also in carrying them out.

The village had always been together and it will stay together or leave together. After some negotiations and because the Druze had good relations with the Jews, our village survived the war and only a small number of people had left it.

Participants spoke about peace-making activities: My father had been a moderate man, even during the mandate he identified with the Palestinian opposition, which objected to the Mufti, Haj Amin al Husseini's, outlook. He believed and it was possible and necessary to reach a compromise, even if that required dividing the land between the two nations. So we supported the partition plan of 1947. When the riots broke out, the family decided to take a risk. My father said that the high-ranking clerks did not know what was going on so we had to do things carefully. I was in charge of a committee concerning people's welfare; we supplied food and flour for people who could not buy them because of the riots.

Social system of influence

Findings suggest that the various social systems influenced resilience, including family, workplaces, schools, and neighborhoods', communities, religious, institutional, and societal. The reciprocal influence between and among systems and its impact on resilience was also established. The following themes emerged: a) Family, b) The importance of the family group was expressed by all participants.

For example,

Members strived to maintain family ties: To get married to start a Family. Family is important, it gives a meaning. Even though everyone does it. It is very important.

Overcoming separation and loss of family was difficult: Coming back [to Israel/Palestine] was extremely difficult; I walked on foot from Syria to Lebanon. I crossed the border to Lebanon illegally, I was afraid of being detained on the border and taken back to Syria. Nevertheless, in those days many people walked the same path, thousands of Palestinian crossed the border in each direction to check on their families.

Work. Participants distinguished between working in trades or in agriculture. Some engaged in both, depending on local and family circumstances. Pride in providing for oneself and one's family was often evident.

Working in agriculture could be lucrative, but some made a meager living: I was born in Majd Al Kurum in 1931, to a peasant family who owned lots of property; my father was among the biggest landowners in the village. The lands were our financial base. We grew a variety of crops, fruit trees and grains.

School. Attending school was important to most participants. However, school attendance was not equally available, depending on gender, finances, the extent of conflict in the area, and living in a particular geographical location.

A participant recognized the benefits that could be accrued from education, and she speaks for all: I had decided I wanted to study. I went to the woman in charge, and she (the supervisor) had asked me, "What do you do?" I told her I worked in a TB hospital. She said, "You do not know anything, you start (your education) from

scratch". I was willing to do that.

Neighborhood/Community/Religions. Participants remember their neighborhoods through the positive lens of religious support and a positive sense of ethnic community. They said,

We settled on a barren hill and began from scratch. RG was the first secretary [of the Kibbutz]. Everyone was 23 and under. There were fifty people, couples and singles. There was a sense of beginning in everything, like in the wheat section that RG established. Symbolism too had great value: they both recall the writing of the scroll on moving onto the land.

Alma was a relatively large village, towards the end of the mandate, 1,300 people had lived there. All of them were Muslims, worked in agriculture. Our village was famous for its olives and high quality oil.

Sociocultural dimensions of resilience

The sociocultural dimensions of resilience refer to social meanings associated with aging and the life-course. As participants in the study were in the later stages of their life-course, they reminisced about the meaning and significance of earlier life events as well as processes that contributed to their resilience.

Participants used idealism to overcome difficult life events: The group was made up of natives who were sons and daughters of the leaders of the labor movement. They had loved the idea of the kibbutz but did not intend for it to apply to their children. These issues let them slip back to the city with relative ease. Many people left because of that situation and the difficult conditions. Our motto was, In such hard conditions, who else will do it?

I grew up in the village, in an agricultural setting. I would say I am a farmer and a son of a farmer it is in my blood. I accompanied my father wherever he went in the fields. As a child, I would go to a spring near the [town of] Kinneret to bring water to our orchards.

Intergroup relationships were seen as good but sometimes conflictual: Mughar has always been a mixed village, with Druze as the majority, Muslims and Christians living together. The village had two Druze Mukhtars, one in each neighborhood, a Christian Mukhtar, and a Muslim Mukhtar. The village's leader was the Muslim Mukhtar, who was also very influential around the city of Tiberias. He worked for the good of everybody. I loved him very much for he was a modest and honest man.

I have no peace from thinking about that [Arabs being chased off the land]. They were promised they would be able to return, but they lost their lands. It made me look for ways to get closer to them over the years, to compensate them. I am proud of the relations I have with them [Jish] today. I mean us and I mean the state of Israel, I feel part of the injustice that was done to them, despite having tried to prevent it.

Interpersonal dimensions of resilience

Participants mention how families supported the interpersonal process of resilience.

"My wife was my partner in realizing the dream so we did not care we were together. I would answer them, we want it, and it is good for us. I did not try to explain it too much. We had ideology, Zionism, building a land for the Jews, a safe haven away from Germany. Safe more or less. When we started building our farm, there was no

electricity or water supply. At first it was very hard, but we learned to cope. We started growing vegetables [using a method] of not watering them: cucumbers, tomatoes, okra".

Personal dimensions of resilience

The personal dimensions of resilience involve participants expressing internal meaning, feelings, and a sense of coherence [22].

A sense of agency is important to resilience: I decided that from now on I will do everything for the country, being a citizen. Quickly my relations with the regime improved and I was even appointed as teacher in the elementary school I had gone to. In 1954, I was appointed principal.

Humor is an important trait in the formation of resiliency: It was not difficult for me. We worried about whether the trees will bear fruit or not. About rain right after reaping the harvest. We, the English, we complain and then laugh about it and move on. There were no hardships, there was plenty of humor. Alice's daughter laughs at us, at the food we ate. There was only plain cream cheese, and we had to eat it even if we did not like it. We accepted everything in good spirits.

Optimism also contributes to resilience: R. thinks that being optimistic is very important. It's all about how you look at it. She said her health deteriorated, and her optimism helped her a lot in rehabilitating herself. "I think it's a matter of character. The cartilage in my back is worn down and I was in a very rough medical situation. The kids and Y. were pessimistic and tried to prepare me to never walk again, but I am optimistic".

Both my wife's mother and my own saw the conditions in which we lived [on the Kibbutz] and could not understand it. My wife was my partner in realizing the dream so we did not care we were together. I would answer them, we want it, and it is good for us.

Hope is another trait that contributes to resilience: Today I am eighty years old; I am glad I stayed in the country maybe not in my own home and on my own land but a few hundred meters away. Life is not simple but I thank God for his edicts and hope that one day there will be peace in the holy land.

Discussion and Conclusion

Survivorship and cross cultural practice

The general findings suggest that most participants exhibited the capacity to survive. Some overcame reaction to past traumas (i.e., Nakba and Shoah). Moreover, they overcame many risks including dislocation, loss, conflict, meager incomes, hunger, and the lack of shelter. They found safety, established control over their environments, and maintained close supportive relationships. Furthermore, they took joy in caring for others, their families, and productive work. These abilities were fostered by family and ethnic group participation, and can also be fostered by social workers in the field as they gather client stories.

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